

Brazil get 'R' boost



REUTERS/AFP, Lisbon

The talented "Triple R" triangle of Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Rivaldo was used to good effect for the first time by Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari in their 1-1 World Cup warm-up against Portugal here on Wednesday.

It was the most positive aspect of the night for Scolari who used Ronaldo just ahead of his near-namesake Paris Saint Germain striker Ronaldinho and Barcelona star Rivaldo.

Ronaldinho's late penalty salvaged Brazil's pride in this evenly balanced friendly between two of the World Cup favourites.

A superb piece of skill from the great Luis Figo had earned Portugal their goal, as he used his midfield vision to feed Inter Milan's Sergio Conceicao with a long pass, leaving him to race into the box and chip the ball into the net past Brazil custodian Marcos.

Scolari took off his two superstar forwards Ronaldo and Rivaldo in the second half, but his side equalised in the 73rd by a penalty converted by another terrific 'R', Ronaldinho who sent goalie Ricardo the wrong way.

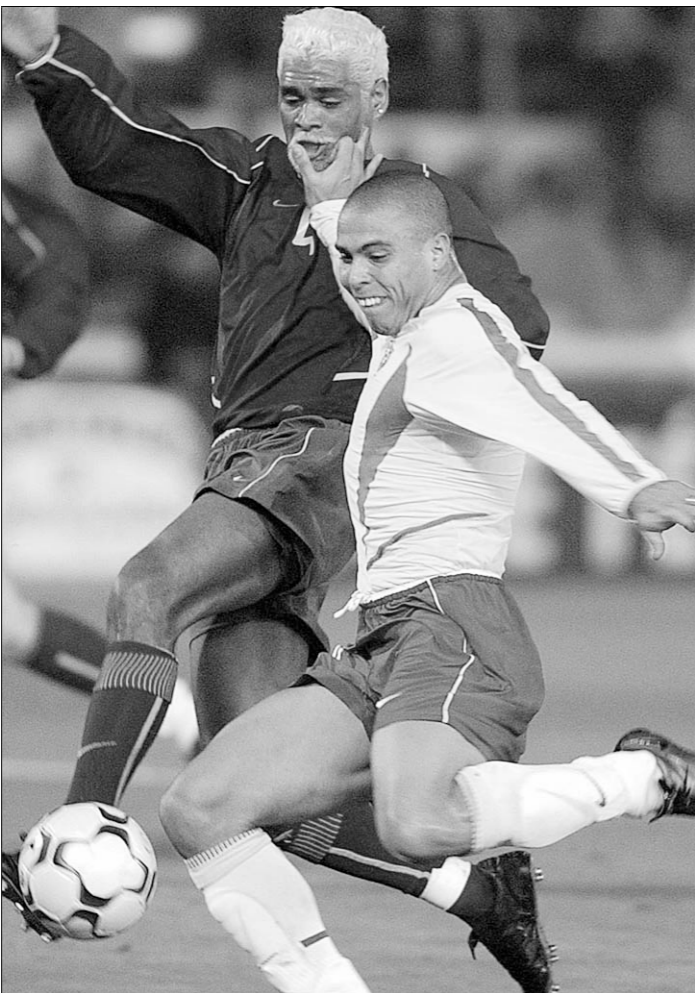
The referee pointed to the spot after Portuguese defender Rui Jorge brought down substitute Edilson, who had been put through by Ronaldinho.

On his Triple R triangle, Scolari added: "It was their first match playing together which in theory should not have been easy but they had a 100 percent understanding. But we must continue to train hard so that the trio continues to work."

Portugal, shocked 4-1 by Finland in Oporto last month, enjoyed most of the possession in the first half and settled into a passing game interrupted by quick counter-attacks from Brazil, on two of which Ronaldo forced saves from goalkeeper Ricardo Pereira.

The injury-plagued Inter Milan forward found himself alone in the box in the 22nd minute after a solo run and Pereira had to deflect Ronaldo's shot with his right foot.

Portugal will play co-hosts South



Brazil superstar Ronaldo (R) about to shoot while Portugal's Abel Javier tries to contain him at Lisbon's Alvalade Stadium on April 17.

Korea, Poland and the United States in group D at the World Cup finals. Four-time winners Brazil take on Turkey, China and Costa Rica in group C.

Rivaldo also narrowly missed a chance to grab an early lead for Brazil when Portugal defender Abel Xavier lost possession inside the area and allowed the Barcelona forward to shoot and force a save from Pereira two minutes before the break.

Portuguese captain Fernando Couto missed two chances to open the scoring for the home side, the first in the 17th minute when he

found a free kick from Figo and forced keeper Marcos to tip his header over the bar.

The Lazio defender missed an open goal in the 24th when he ran forward during a goalmouth scramble after a corner taken by Figo, but hit the ball past the right post.

Smoke from a firework display had barely cleared when the game started, watched by a festive capacity crowd at the Jose de Alvalade stadium, about a quarter of whom were green and yellow-clad resident Brazilians who yied with local supporters to cheer the loudest.

Shortly before kickoff, soccer

greats Pele from Brazil and Portugal's Eusebio walked hand-in-hand onto the pitch to greet the fans and start the celebrations as the crowd threw thousands of coloured cards in the air and loud samba music boomed across the stands.

"I would say that I was about 70 percent satisfied with the team today, we still have some work to do, but at this stage I am very happy," Scolari, known to Brazilians as "Felipao" (Big Phil) told a news conference after the game, noting that it was Brazil's first draw in 16 matches.

"It gives us a very approximate idea of the team that we have and what we can offer at the World Cup. It was one of the toughest games we have played since the qualifiers, apart from the matches against Argentina and Uruguay."

Scolari said he had taken Ronaldo off as he was not yet fully fit, but noted he had what were Brazil's two best chances to score in the first half and hoped he would be on top form in time for the Korea/Japan tournament starting on May 31.

"I have to say Ronaldo is not up to speed yet, but on a psychological level he's doing very well. Of course he has to carry on now at Inter Milan, but he can still have a very good World Cup," the trainer said. "I am very satisfied with his recovery."

Portugal coach Antonio Oliveira said he was pleased with the draw, which showed that Portugal had not been cowed by a team with an unmatched reputation.

"It was made evident today that Portugal are capable of beating any side, as long as they are rigorous, firm, determined and defend the game's principles at the highest level in good time," he said.

"It's important not to have complexes and not to be afraid, in order to win."

"We (the two teams) looked each other in the eyes, each was somewhat wary of the other, and as we speak the same language after all, it had to end in a draw," he added.

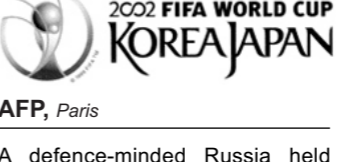
"It was a test we both passed well when you consider that neither team was on top form, and one had injury problems."

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Results from World Cup warm-up matches on Wednesday:

- In Yokohama, Japan Japan 1 (Myojin 70) Costa Rica 1 (Parks 76)
In Bydgoszcz, Poland Poland 1 (Hajto 86) Romania 2 (Ganea 30, Mutu 36)
In Zagreb Croatia 2 (Olic 44, Suker 54) Bosnia 0
In Oslo Norway 0 Sweden 0
In Copenhagen Denmark 3 (Heintze 3, Tomasson 13, Rommedahl 36) Israel 1 (Nimny 90)
In Kerkrade, The Netherlands Turkey 2 (Hakan Sukur 31, Ilhan 81) Chile 0
In Brussels Belgium 1 (Goor 56) Slovakia 1 (Janocko 83)
In Ljubljana Slovenia 1 (Pavlin 23) Tunisia 0
In Dublin Republic of Ireland 2 (Kinsella 6, Doherty 83) USA 1 (Pope 34)
In Vienna Austria 0 Cameroon 0
In Stuttgart, Germany Germany 0 Argentina 1 (Sorin 48)
In Milan, Italy Italy 1 (Panucci 74) Uruguay 1 (Abreu 77)
In Paris France 0 Russia 0
In Liverpool, England England 4 (Owen 4, Murphy 47, Vassell 55, Ayala 78-og) Paraguay 0
In Aberdeen, Scotland Scotland 1 (Daily 7) Nigeria 2 (Aghahowa 40, 69)
In Belfast Northern Ireland 0 Spain 5 (Raul 23, 54, Baraja 47, Puyol 69, Morientes 78)
In Murcia, Spain South Africa 0 Ecuador 0
In Lisbon Portugal 1 (Sergio Conceicao 60) Brazil 1 (Ronaldinho 73-pen)
In East Rutherford, New Jersey Mexico 1 (Francisco Gabriel 90) Bulgaria 0

World champs checked



AFP, Paris

A defence-minded Russia held mighty France to a goalless draw in a hard-fought World Cup warm-up international at the Stade de France here on Wednesday.

France, who treated their fans to a goal feast last month with a 5-0 rout of Scotland, found the Russians too tough to crack after dominating for most of the 90 minutes.

Despite sweeping forward in a series of second-half raids on the Russian goal, the world and European champions were unable to break down opponents who were content to pack midfield and wait for openings on the counter.

"I think there was a little bit of frustration on our side and with the Russians too," said French coach Roger Lemerre.

"Things were equal in the first half with both goalkeepers in good form. We just didn't have the right spark to break through. There were some opportunities for us but the Russians were well-organised in defence.

"I just hope we don't meet them again in the World Cup finals." France midfielder Patrick Vieira said his team-mates had never felt in danger but admitted the Russians had asked some awkward questions of his side.

"We were always confident. We were expecting a difficult match against a well-organised team capable of causing us some problems and that's what we got - but the important thing was not to lose," the Arsenal star said.

"We'll go away with some useful lessons. They're a very good side," he added.

Fullback Bixente Lizarazu echoed Vieira's comments. "For a friendly match there was a lot of aggression out there," the Bayern Munich player said. "It was a tough game. With a bit more luck we could have won."

World Cup-bound Russia - who inflicted France's one and only defeat at the Stade de France in 1999 - had Italy-based goalkeeper Ruslan Nigmatullin to thank for the draw.

The talented Verona shot-stopper pulled off a series of saves, including a brave last minute block



Russia's Valery Karpin (C) guards French maestro Zinedine Zidane (R) at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis on April 17.

from Thierry Henry, as Russia successfully weathered the French storm.

France, who kick off the World Cup against Senegal on May 31, had grown increasingly frustrated as the game wore on, and saw substitute Vincent Candela booked late in the game.

Russia, who had resorted to several niggly fouls during the second half, had Valery Karpin and Yuri Nikiforov given yellow cards by English referee Mike Riley.

That will not have bothered Russian coach Oleg Romantsev however as his side prepare to face Japan, Belgium and Tunisia in the first phase of next month's extravaganza.

Although unable to find the back of the Russian net, France created a string of scoring opportunities, with Marcel Desailly, Zinedine Zidane and substitute Alain Boghossian all going close in the second half.

France had dominated the first half and came closest to scoring when recalled Liverpool striker Nicolas Anelka tapped in the rebound from a ferocious Emmanuel Petit strike on 34 minutes only to be adjudged offside.

Anelka, recalled to the squad after a six-month absence and anxious to stake a claim for a place in France's World Cup party, had a quiet match and was eventually replaced by Parma's Johan Micoud.

France's most dangerous attacker early on was Arsenal's

Henry, whose electric bursts down the left flank caused all manner of problems for the outpaced Russian right-back Viacheslav Daev.

With Zidane pulling the strings in midfield it seemed only a matter of time before France opened their account.

A Frank Leboeuf header was glanced just wide and Anelka saw a weak shot cleared away after Zidane had sent the moody centre-forward sprinting in on goal.

But despite France's evident superiority, the expectant home fans were denied a goal as the Russians strung five men across midfield to stifle the French threat.

Although only playing with Vladimir Beschastnykh as a lone striker, Russia did manage to cause a couple of nervous moments in French ranks.

Their best chance of the half came on 29 minutes when a splendid pass from Alexandre Mostovoi caught the French defence square to put Beschastnykh clear.

The Spartak Moscow forward was unable to capitalise on the opportunity, however feebly failing to get a shot on target and allowing the French defence to recover.

Midfielder Karpin also threatened just before half-time when he unleashed a vicious 25-yard strike that forced a good save from Fabien Barthez, the Manchester United 'keeper parrying over for a corner.

Sorin sinks Germany



AFP, Stuttgart

Argentina, one of the favourites to lift the World Cup for the third time this summer, showed their battling qualities to clinch a 1-0 win over Germany in a warm-up match for the finals here on Wednesday.

In front of 50,000 spectators, it was a single goal just after the interval from defender Juan Pablo Sorin which separated the two teams after a gruelling encounter which saw five men booked.

"I think our victory was well-deserved," said Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa.

"But no way was it an easy win for us against a German team for whom I had and still have great respect."

Both squads were hit by injuries, giving fringe players a chance to force their way into the reckoning for the World Cup which kicks off in Japan and South Korea on May 31.

Argentina's winner came after 47 minutes.

The impressive Lazio striker Claudio Lopez, who had been a dangerous player throughout the opening period, crossed from the right and Cruzeiro defender Sorin nipped in ahead of his marker to nod the ball in from 15 yards with German keeper Jens Lehmann left flat-footed.

Borussia Dortmund's Lehmann was the busiest of the two goalkeepers in the first half, saving twice to deny Claudio Lopez after 20 minutes and then ten minutes from the break when Lopez had been put through by Marcelo Gallardo.

Lehmann, a late replacement for regular keeper Oliver Kahn, who was suffering from a stomach upset, was on hand again to parry away a 38th-minute shot from Celta



Juan Pablo Sorin of Argentina is ecstatic after scoring the winner against Germany at Stuttgart on April 17.

Vigo's Gustavo Lopez. Despite the South Americans' pressure, Bayern Munich's Thomas Linke was unfortunate when his header hit the post in the 15th minute.

The first half was also bad-tempered with four players booked for various lunges, Jens Jeremies and Michael Ballack of Germany and Walter Samuel and Pablo Aimar all receiving yellow cards.

Germany coach Rudi Voller said his team were too cautious. "Perhaps we had too much respect for this Argentinian team," he said.

"But they are one of the favourites for the World Cup, they were the best team out there tonight and they could have scored a second goal at the end of the match."

Ballack was quick to agree with his coach. "We didn't play very well. We didn't really believe in our chances tonight and perhaps we had too much respect for the big names of the Argentine team," said the Bayer Leverkusen midfielder.

Both sides went into the match weakened by injuries to leading players.

German coach Rudi Voller was without regulars Dietmar Hamann, Bernd Schneider, Oliver Neuville, Marco Bode, Christian Ziege, Jorg Heinrich and Christian Wornos.

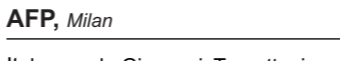
Argentina were missing Claudio Caniggia, Juan Sebastian Veron, Gabriel Batistuta and Hernan Crespo.

Tempers, which had been frayed in the first half, got even more heated after the break with defender Facundo Quiroga booked for a foul on Miroslav Klose who was almost clean through on goal.

Gallardo, a first half substitute for Pablo Aimar, was himself taken off after a crunching tackle from Jeremies while his replacement Santiago Solari was left rolling on the pitch just five minutes later after another crunching tackle.

Despite the result, it will be hard for either Voller or his Argentinian counterpart Marcelo Bielsa to judge too much from the game with so many big names missing.

Trap extends contract



AFP, Milan

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni on Wednesday agreed a two-year extension to his contract with the national side.

Trapattoni, whose previous contract was set to expire after this year's World Cup, will now stay at the helm until 2004.

The 63-year-old reached the agreement with Italian Football Federation (FIGC) president Franco Carraro on Wednesday hours before his team was set to face Uruguay in a World Cup warm-up match at Milan's San Siro Stadium.

The move comes after media reports that several clubs - notably Lazio - had wanted to lure the former AC Milan, Juventus, Inter Milan and Bayern Munich boss back into domestic football.

"I was not committed to leaving," explained Trapattoni after the 1-1 draw with Uruguay. "I wanted an agreement with Carraro and asked for some time to reflect."

"This is a gratifying show of faith in me and it all goes to prove that 30 years as a football coach have not been in vain."

After Wednesday's match in his 16 games in charge of Italy since succeeding Dino Zoff after Euro 2000 Trapattoni had only lost one game, a 2-1 reverse in Rome at the hands of Argentina last year.



GIOVANNI TRAPATTONI

4-star debut for Owen



AFP, Milan

Michael Owen crowned his first game as England captain by scoring the opening goal in an easy 4-0 win over fellow World Cup qualifiers Paraguay in a warm-up friendly at Anfield on Wednesday.

The Liverpool striker, given the captain's armband in the absence of injured skipper David Beckham and playing in front of his home crowd, headed England into an early lead after good work from club colleague Steven Gerrard.

Two goals in the opening 10 minutes of the second half from substitute Danny Murphy and Darius Vassell put England in total control and a late own goal from Celso Ayala rounded off a comfortable victory for the home side.

Asked how it felt to captain England Owen told Sky Sports: "It was a great feeling, particularly at my own club. And the goal calmed the nerves."

Owen was pleased to give the fans something to cheer about in England's last friendly on home soil before the team jets off for this summer's finals in Japan and South Korea.

"It was a good result - we needed something like that to take with us," he added.

"It was the last time we play on these shores and so it was nice to give everyone a nice send-off."

"It was a disciplined performance. We didn't play well against Italy (in England's last friendly) - everyone knew we could play a lot better."

"We put that right tonight. It is always nice to get a 4-0 against whoever. It has come at a good time."

Gerrard, who laid on the first goal for team-mate Owen said: "I was asked to do a job out on the right. The coach asked me to perform the role and I was quite pleased with how I played."

"I set Michael up a couple of times - that is my job, to supply him with a service."

"I prefer the centre of midfield but I don't mind going off on the right if there is an injury. I have played in the centre since I was a lad so I am used to it."

England coach Sven Goran Eriksson admitted his team had gone off the boil since qualifying for the World Cup, but was delighted with the attitude of his players who battling it out for a place in the final 23-man squad.

"After the last qualifying game against Greece we sat down a little and took it more easily but today we came back and showed there are many players who want to play in the World Cup," said the 53-year-old Swede.



England captain Michael Owen (L) and Nicky Butt celebrate Owen's strike against Paraguay at Anfield on April 17.

campaign - and the start of the World Cup.

"Of course I'm looking forward to the World Cup very much," he said.

"It's difficult for players to be focused on the league, Champions League, the FA Cup and the World Cup."

"I'm responsible for England - I look forward to the league being finished."

Eriksson gave Vassell another chance to stake his claim for a spot in the finals.

The Aston Villa forward came into the squad to replace the injured Emile Heskey while Gerrard was given the task of filling Beckham's shoes on the right flank.

Kieron Dyer, now fully recovered from injury, started on the left-hand side of midfield following some impressive performances for Newcastle.

England took the lead in the fourth minute when Vassell was hauled down 25 yards from goal.

Gerrard stepped up and floated the free-kick into the Paraguay penalty area where 22-year-old Owen rose highest to direct a firm header past goalkeeper Ricardo Tavarelli to crown his appearance as England's youngest captain since Bobby Moore in 1963.

Tavarelli, replacing eccentric stopper Jose Luis Chilavert who was ruled out with a shoulder injury, had a torrid night.

Paraguay threatened for the first time after Nicky Butt conceded a free-kick on the edge of his own penalty area, but England keeper David Seaman dealt comfortably with Francisco Arce's low effort.

England came close to doubling their advantage seven minutes

before half-time, but Tavarelli was quick to smother Dyer's goalbound shot.

The South Americans finished the first-half with a flourish and Roque Santa Cruz was only inches away from levelling but could not connect with Diego Gavilan's low cross.

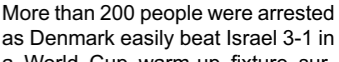
Eriksson made six changes for the start of the second-half and two of his substitutes were involved in England's second goal two minutes after the break.

Robbie Fowler received the ball on the edge of the penalty box and held off his marker superbly before teeing up Murphy.

The Liverpool midfielder's shot took a wicked deflection off Carlos Gamarra and flew past Tavarelli into the net.

Eight minutes later England put the game beyond doubt by grabbing their third goal.

Over 200 arrested in Copenhagen



AFP, Copenhagen

More than 200 people were arrested as Denmark easily beat Israel 3-1 in a World Cup warm-up fixture surrounded by high security here on Wednesday.

Three thousand police were drafted in for the match after a bomb threat was received on Tuesday vowing to blow up the Parken stadium if the match went ahead.

Police said about 150 anti-Israeli demonstrators were apprehended shortly before the match after refusing to disband during a demonstration near the stadium calling for peace in the Middle East.

About 50 others were arrested just before the fixture when about 200 young supporters tried to penetrate the security perimeter around the stadium, clashing with dog-handling police officers.

In the stadium, which was three-quarters empty, two young supporters got on to the pitch after Denmark went into an early two-goal lead, one with a T-shirt saying "Boycott Israel" and both waving small Palestinian flags. Both were quickly apprehended by security personnel.

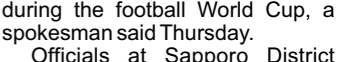
Nearly six thousand spectators, out of 17,600 tickets sold, had their ticket money reimbursed, the Danish football federation (DBU) said.

Many spectators said they wanted their money back in protest against the escalating violence in the Middle East.

The Secretary-General of the DBU Jim Stjerne Hansen said Tuesday he regretted choosing Israel as Denmark's opponents.

Hansen said the plans for the match were made last August when the situation in the Middle East was calmer.

Prosecutors want Cup reprieve!



AFP, Tokyo

A Japanese district court may halt criminal trials in early June to let prosecutors handle a possible flood of cases of arrested hooligans during the football World Cup, a spokesman said Thursday.

Officials at Sapporo District Court, on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido, have asked judges to suspend criminal cases as a precautionary measure, the court spokesman said.

Sapporo will host the hotly contested England-Argentina game on June 7.

"We asked judges to defer criminal trials in early June, maybe for 10 days or so, because it is possible that many so-called hooligans might be arrested during that period," he said.

Uruguay deny Italy



AFP, Milan

when Gianluca Pessotto had to limp off after just five minutes, a disappointment for the Juventus player who has an outside chance of filling one of two remaining vacancies in the World Cup squad.

Preliminary reports said that Pessotto had cruciate ligament damage although a definitive diagnosis will be made on Thursday - but if that proves true he is highly unlikely to play in the World Cup.

Asked if Italy should have risked injuries by playing a friendly Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni said: "(England midfielder David) Beckham got injured playing for his club - football is a dangerous profession, I don't see why we should make a controversy out of it."

team and was pleased with the performance.

"It was a good work-out, a fine performance by the team - these matches where lots of changes are made are difficult but the team kept to the job."

Uruguay nearly took an early lead when Dario Silva drew goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and centred towards Alvaro Recoba only for Alessio Tacchinardi to make a saving tackle.

There were appeals when Italy substitute Marco Di Vaio tumbled in the penalty area but French referee Stephane Bre sternly admonished the Parma striker for what he considered to be a dive.

Finally Italy began to stir and Vincenzo Montella - another replacement - forced a fine save from substitute keeper Gustavo Munua after racing onto a pass from Genaro Gattuso.

Stefano Fiore Panucci rose to head the ball home and finally lift the spirits of the sparse 16,733 San Siro crowd.

But Uruguay quickly equalised. Substitute Richard Morales centred from the left and Abreu directed the ball goalwards.

However, it probably would not have had the momentum to cross the line had Toledo not pawed the ball backwards into his own net.

Di Vaio's late shot saved a post and Montella saw an effort trickle wide but a draw was probably a fair result.

This match was one for the historians, pitting together Uruguay and Italy who won the first four World Cups between them after the tournament's inauguration in 1930. Italy have since won a third World Cup in 1982.

Uruguay coach Victor Pua reported a clean bill of health for his

And from the resultant corner by